

Perspectives on the Application Process

These are general perspectives.

Seek out perspectives from multiple sources and seek specifics from program websites.

Process Overview

Give yourself adequate **planning** and **preparation** time. Finding schools, programs, and advisors that suit your interests, career goals, and skill sets takes time and thought. The application process involves substantial documentation from different sources. Begin at least six months to one year before application deadlines.

Remember that graduate applications are reviewed by faculty committees, not by a generic Admissions Office. You are applying to those faculty to work with them in their program.

List of Schools

Use resources like the CC Career Center, Psychology Department website, advice from faculty members, and guides like the APA Guide to Graduate Programs to develop a **preliminary list** of potential schools (maybe 40) that you will narrow down to a **shorter list** to which to apply (5 to 10). Do not get too wrapped up in this task – any school with potential will do as you will learn more and refine your choice dynamics as you continue through the process.

As you narrow your list based on program specifics, keep in mind that **lifestyle** and **location** factors are extremely important as you will be living in the area for years. Do **not** make these factors part of your letters or communications, e.g., “I wanted to be somewhere sunny!”

Transcripts

Only include transcripts which contributed to your degree or have some pertinence to your interests. Allow enough time for the transcript-request process to complete.

CV or Resumé

The expected format of CVs and resúmes can vary from program to program and change over time with documentation trends. Seek out guidance on common formats from those who review applications or have expertise in application processes, or from high-quality guides.

Statement of Purpose

See the corresponding document from the Psychology Department: *Writing the Graduate School Statement of Purpose*.

Recommendation Letters

Most programs require three letters of recommendation to accompany the application.

Find people who think highly of you as a person and are familiar with your work experience, in school or in the real world. **Professors** or people who rank high in the psychology or neuroscience field have by far the most influence. It is most impressive if you have worked on their **research** or had them supervise your own research. Choose your recommenders carefully.

If you are out of touch with professors or people you would like to write for you, definitely send a **preliminary letter/e-mail** reintroducing yourself (who you are, what work you did with them, what you have been up to, and what you plan on doing). Basically, show good etiquette. Then follow up with phone calls.

Make sure you provide letter writers with a detailed list of the schools and programs to which you are applying, including the process for submitting letters to each program, and where appropriate, program web links or contact information.

Also provide letter writers with your resume/CV, coursework/grades in psychology or in your major, GPA, extracurriculars, research/work experience, GRE scores if you have them, and anything else important about you that might become part of a letter.

GRE Testing

At one time the vast majority of schools required submission of standardized test scores (e.g., GRE, MCAT, LSAT, GMAT). There is a trend over time toward schools making such tests optional, though it varies by school and program – e.g., more so for GRE, less so for MCAT. Even when optional, a strong test score can aid your application or help you obtain optional fellowships or grants.

Seeking out practice tests and review programs (free or for a fee) is recommended, particularly if you are beginning the process several years after earning your bachelor's degree. Steady practice over a good length of time tends to yield the best improvements to score.

If you plan to take the Psychology Subject Test for the GRE, reviewing Introduction to Psychology and History of Psychology textbooks can be helpful. Focus on the names of major scholars, theories, or important studies more so than deep nuances of the work.

Interviews

The more you learn about a given program the better, particularly if you are going to an interview. You are most likely to have an **in-person interview** for Neuroscience and Clinical Psychology graduate programs. You may have a **phone interview** for other types of programs.

While interviews may vary widely, one general piece of advice is to appear well-informed and eager to learn more (not omniscient!)

Admission!!!

Schools inform applicants of their admittance as early as January. Professors may call or email. By mid-March you should have heard from all your schools. April 15th is the generally accepted deadline for accepting or rejecting admission offers.

<https://cgsnet.org/resources/for-current-prospective-graduate-students/april-15-resolution>

Before accepting or rejecting an offer, visit as many schools as you can, speak with current students in each program, and try to learn where recent graduates of the program went as their next step.